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Lit'ry life

The celebration of surface continues apace in American magazine journalism with scarcely a sign of when or where it will end.

The latest Rolling Stone devotes 18 pages to Diana Vreeland, the former editor of a New York fashion magazine, drooling over her pronouncements on fashion and chic as if they were being handed down on tablets of stone. The latest TV Guide reports on the unhappiness of Johnny Carson, a man who makes \$3. million a year, for working four days a week and who, according to an associate, "would work a one-day week if he could think up a sensible enough reason."

In New York, the celebrities depend not only on psychoanalysts but on psychoanalysts who are, in their own right, celebrities. Or at least celebrities in that they treat celebrities. So writes Susan Edmiston in a provocative piece in the August Esquire on Mildred Newman and Bernard Berkowitz, authors of "How To Be Your Own Best Friend." As one of their patients explains: "It's like they go zap! and all of a sudden people who go to them are translated into successes."

This week's People has a cover story on Jacqueline Bisset, who was on the cover of Newsweek two weeks ago. Or was it Time last week? The July/August More, a media magazine which once regorously policed newspaper journalism, devotes pages to obscure tables and a graph purporting to measure the influence of the New York theater critics. Producers are asked to comment on critics. "Critics are beasts," responds one. "Highly disturbed people, basically frustrated, totally insincere, and brutalized by the profession they're in." Of the New York Times's new theater critic, the producer says: "He will make an arch-murderer. He is cold-blooded, evil."

One skims the pages of the magazines on the stands this summer, searching for something genuine. The August Penthouse has a readable expose of the Copley Press, Inc., and its subsidiary, the Copley News Service, a news syndicate, both of which, according to writers Joe Trento and Dave Roman, provided credentials, information and placement of stories for the CIA and the FBI. The story is followed by a pictorial spread of a limber 22-year-old woman wearing only stockings.

The August Ladies' Home Journal has an intriguing article — Linda Wolfe's "The Unfaithful Husband" — with an arresting statistic: Half of American husbands and close to a third of American wives engage in adultery. It also features an interview of "Miss Lillian" by her daughter, Gloria Carter Spann, in which Lillian Carter talks about her family. I suspect that the editors of the Journal may be the only magazine editors left who think there's anything new to be said (a) by Miss Lillian or (b) about the Carter family.

The search for something new leads us to the July/August Film Comment, the publication of the Film Society of Lincoln Center and its piece de resistance, a critique by Raymond Durnat saying that the apotheosized Hollywood director Howard Hawks wasn't all he's cracked up to be. Unfortunately, Durnat can't make his point without consuming rivers of print. I had to bail out when he suggests that Hawks's "To Have And Have Not" is inferior to "Islands In The Stream."

Perhaps the most novel article I encountered this week was Barbara Gilder Quint's "When You Fight With Your Neighbors" in the Aug. 23 Family Circle. Quint says that the law states "that although your neighbor has a right to 'reasonable enjoyment' of his property, this right stops when he engages in any activity — even if it is conducted entirely on his premises — which deprives you of the 'reasonable enjoyment' of yours."

All right, so maybe it's not the most pressing social issue of the day. At least it's a start.

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